Aggregating and Sharing Terrorism-Related Data on a Large Scale

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In our networked world, we reap the benefits of data aggregation on a daily basis. For example, I work in DC and when my team and I are looking for a good lunch, we use all kinds of data to find it. Today, we are turning to Yelp, Twitter, and a few others for help. We allow our smart phone apps to access our location and preferences to provide restaurant recommendations, and we can see where other colleagues are eating. Finally, the tweets from the ever-popular street vendor food trucks [1] down the street win us over (the lobster roll guys and the empanada vendor are team favorites). This works because we allow services to aggregate and share certain data with vendors and friends.

The practice of sharing and aggregating terrorism-related data between federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial mission partners [2] is conceptually the same but far more difficult. We are often working with information that is not identically structured, resides on systems that do not conform to common standards, and often contains personally identifiable information about US persons that must be protected. The Information Sharing Environment (ISE) is currently working with our agency mission partners in the Data Aggregation Working Group under the White House?s Information Sharing and Access Interagency Policy Committee (ISA IPC) [3] to solve the challenges of sharing information while protecting individual privacy [4].

Our Scope ? What Does Large Scale Mean?

ISE mission partners [2] are continually producing and consuming data from a wide variety of sources ? it is our job to ensure that as our community adds data volume, we also add meaning to the relationships between that data. Our focus in the ISE is on data as it supports the missions [5] of counterterrorism, countering weapons of mass destruction, and homeland security. We define data aggregation as the collection of processes, policies, procedures, and technologies that allows for the detection of relationships between people, places, things, and characteristics - linking information across organizations and helping analysts to identify the connections between data that are not obviously related.

The Data Aggregation Working Group

The ISA IPC [3] Data Aggregation Working Group is the forum in which our communities come together to address the challenges of resourcing, optimizing, and advancing the capabilities of large-scale data aggregation for the ISE. The working group must leverage existing processes and best practices to develop solutions for ISE data aggregation programs. Our work continues to evolve. As we examine the technical, policy, and legal implications and provide recommendations on how to improve access to key data sets across the ISE enterprise, we enhance the protection and security of our citizens.

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